



Virginia Reading Assessment for
Elementary and Special Education Teachers

and

Virginia Reading Assessment for
Reading Specialists

STUDY GUIDE

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS, INC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1: About the Virginia Reading Assessment 1-1

Introduction

Structure of the Tests

For More Information

Section 2: Preparing for the Tests 2-1

Studying for the Test

Test-Taking Tips

Section 3: Sample Test Items for Elementary and Special Education Teachers 3-1

Multiple-Choice Items

Constructed-Response Items

Section 4: Sample Test Items for Reading Specialists 4-1

Multiple-Choice Items

Constructed-Response Items

Section 5: Preparation Resources 5-1

Glossary

Acknowledgments

Reading List

Readers should be advised that this study guide, including many of the excerpts used herein, is protected by federal copyright law.

Copyright © 2004 by National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (NES®)

"Virginia Reading Assessment," "VRA," and the "Virginia Reading Assessment" logo are trademarks of the Virginia Department of Education and National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (NES®).

"NES®" and its logo are registered trademarks of National Evaluation Systems, Inc.™

SECTION 1

ABOUT THE VIRGINIA READING ASSESSMENT

This section of the Virginia Reading Assessment (VRA™) Study Guide provides general information about the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers and the VRA for Reading Specialists. After reading this section, you will understand the purpose of these tests, who must take them, how they are developed and administered, and the specifics of their content. This section also lists resources for obtaining further information about the VRA.

Introduction

The VRA comprises two separate tests: the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers and the VRA for Reading Specialists. The VRA is a criterion-referenced and objectives-based assessment. It is designed to measure a candidate's knowledge and skills in relation to an established standard, rather than in relation to the performance of other candidates.

The content of the VRA is aligned with the English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools (SOL) and reading competencies contained in the *Virginia Licensure Regulations for School Personnel*. Furthermore, the VRA is consistent with the recommendations of the Committee to Enhance the K–12 Teaching Experience in Virginia, the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure (ABTEL), and the Panel for Reviewing Reading Assessment for Initial Licensure. Test blueprints and test items were reviewed by panels of Virginia educators.

The VRA is designed to measure candidates' preparation in the five key components of effective reading instruction—phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Refer to "Structure of the Tests" in this section for detailed information on the content and format of each test.

Who Must Take These Tests?

The VRA includes two separate assessments: the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers, and the VRA for Reading Specialists. Beginning July 1, 2004, the VRA will be required of all candidates applying for initial licensure as elementary (preK–3 or preK–6) teachers, special education teachers (except teachers of early childhood special education, speech-language pathologists, and teachers of students with severe disabilities), or reading specialists. In addition, the test is required for individuals seeking to add an endorsement as a reading specialist. On June 23, 2004, the Commonwealth of Virginia Board of Education approved the exemption of early childhood special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and teachers of students with severe disabilities from the requirement of the VRA.

How Were the Tests Developed?

This topic describes the major steps in developing the VRA.

Step	Description
Develop the Test Blueprints	<p>The content of each test is documented in the test blueprint. VRA test blueprints consist of test domains that each include a set of test objectives, along with a set of descriptive statements that further elaborate the content of each test objective.</p> <p>During preparation of the test blueprints, key state and national documents and Virginia educators were consulted. Committees of Virginia educators reviewed the test blueprints and made revisions, as necessary, to ensure that the test blueprints were accurate, free of bias, job related, representative of the diversity of the state, and consistent with the purposes of the program.</p>
Conduct Match Study for Test Blueprints	<p>To verify the alignment of the test blueprints with Virginia requirements, Virginia educators were asked to rate the agreement of each test blueprint with the English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools (SOL) and the <i>Virginia Licensure Regulations for School Personnel</i> in identified areas. Based on these ratings, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (NES®), determined the content of the test blueprints, and a content validation survey of each test blueprint was conducted.</p>
Validate Test Content	<p>The content validation survey was conducted using randomly sampled practicing Virginia public school educators and teacher preparation program faculty to ensure that the test blueprints reflect the knowledge and skills considered to be important for performing the job of an educator in Virginia.</p>
Develop Test Items	<p>Next, test items were developed to assess the content defined by the test blueprints. Committees of Virginia educators were convened to review and approve the test items. Several hundred students preparing to teach at different licensure levels participated in field tests of the test items at field test sites throughout Virginia.</p>
Conduct Match Study for Test Items	<p>As part of the planned validity verification, a second match study was conducted with Virginia educators to determine the match of individual VRA test items with each test blueprint and with Virginia requirements.</p>
Set Passing Scores	<p>A committee of Virginia educators will convene following the first several test administrations to recommend the passing score for each VRA test. The final passing scores will be determined by the Commonwealth of Virginia Board of Education.</p>

What Happens at a Test Administration?

The VRA is offered six times a year at a number of testing sites across the state. Test sessions are held in the morning, and candidates have up to four hours to complete the test. For current information about VRA test dates, sites, fees, registration procedures and policies, refer to the VRA Registration Bulletin located at www.vra.nesinc.com.

During the testing session, candidates will be asked to record answers in a separate answer document. Only answers marked in these documents will be scored. Candidates may work at their own pace and complete the test items in the order they wish. Candidates are free to leave at any time during the test session once their materials have been collected and they have been released by the test administrator. Refer to Section 2 for information on how to prepare to take the VRA.

How Will My Test be Scored?

For multiple-choice items, you will be asked to record your answers on a machine-readable answer document for scoring by machine. VRA tests may include some multiple-choice items that are being evaluated for future administration of the VRA and that do not affect a candidate's test results.

For constructed-response items, you will be asked to record your response in the answer document(s) provided. Constructed-response items are scored holistically according to standardized procedures, using scoring scales that have been approved by the VDOE. In judging the overall effectiveness of each response, scorers use scoring scales that describe varying levels of performance.

As a whole, the response to each assignment must demonstrate an understanding of the content of the field. Responses are scored on the extent to which they achieve the purpose of the assignment, are appropriate and accurate in the application of subject matter knowledge, provide high-quality and relevant supporting evidence, and demonstrate a soundness of argument and an understanding of the subject area.

Typically, each response is scored by two or more qualified educators during the scoring sessions held after each VRA test administration. Scorers are oriented before each scoring session to ensure that responses are scored according to standardized procedures.

How Will I Receive Test Results?

Preparation of score reports will be implemented after the Commonwealth of Virginia Board of Education has approved the passing standard for the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers and the passing standard for the VRA for Reading Specialists. Candidates who complete the VRA prior to the establishment of the passing standards will be issued a "Certificate of Participation" confirming that the candidate satisfied the VRA requirement according to Board of Education guidelines. When the passing standard has been established, those candidates with certificates of participation, whose scores meet the passing standard, will be issued an individual score report.

Structure of the Tests

The VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers and the VRA for Reading Specialists consist of multiple-choice items and constructed-response items. The multiple-choice items require candidates to select the best choice from a list of four possible responses. The constructed-response items require candidates to write a response of varying length based on the knowledge being tested.

The content of each VRA test is documented in its test blueprint, which is available on the VRA Web site at www.vra.nesinc.com. Refer to "Read the Test Blueprint" in Section 2 for a description of the content and format of the VRA test blueprints. The VRA test structure is as follows:

- Each test field is organized into four to six domains defining the major content areas of the test.
- Each domain includes one or more test objectives. The test objectives are broad, conceptual statements, written in language that reflects some of the skills, knowledge, and understanding that an educator needs in order to teach reading in Virginia public schools.
- Each test objective is clarified and further described by a descriptive statement, providing examples of the types of content covered by the test objective.
- Each multiple-choice item is written to assess understanding of a test objective.
- Each constructed-response item is written to assess understanding of one or more test objectives.

Refer to the sections that follow for detailed information on the content of each test.

The VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers

The VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers is comprised of 90 multiple-choice items and four (4) constructed-response items. You should plan to use about 15 minutes to respond to each constructed-response item.

The following table lists the number of multiple-choice and constructed-response items occurring on each section of the test as they relate to the content domains of the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers test blueprint. Refer to the VRA Web site at www.vra.nesinc.com to read the test blueprint.

Domain	Multiple-Choice Items (MCIs)	Constructed-Response Items
I. Assessment and Diagnostic Teaching (includes knowledge of formal and informal assessment techniques and use of diagnostic data to plan effective reading instruction)	17–19 (approx 20% of the MCIs)	1
II. Oral Language and Oral Communication (includes knowledge of phonemic awareness, listening and speaking skills, and instructional strategies for speakers of other languages and dialects)	17–19 (approx 20% of the MCIs)	1
III. Reading Development (includes knowledge of reading skills and processes in the areas of phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and reading fluency)	35–37 (approx 40% of the MCIs)	1
IV. Writing and Research (includes knowledge of writing skills, processes, and conventions; creative expression; use of technology for writing and research)	17–19 (approx 20% of the MCIs)	1

The VRA for Reading Specialists

The VRA for Reading Specialists is comprised of 90 multiple-choice items and two (2) constructed-response items. You should plan to use about 30 minutes to respond to the constructed-response item and about 60 minutes to respond to the case study assignment.

The following table lists the number of multiple-choice and constructed-response items occurring on each section of the test as they relate to the content domains of the VRA for Reading Specialists test blueprint. Refer to the VRA Web site at www.vra.nesinc.com to read the test blueprint.

Domain	Multiple-Choice Items (MCIs)	Constructed-Response Items
I. Assessment and Diagnostic Teaching (includes knowledge of formal and informal assessment techniques and use of diagnostic data to plan effective reading instruction)	17–19 (approx 20% of the MCIs)	
II. Oral Language and Oral Communication (includes knowledge of phonemic awareness, listening and speaking skills, and instructional strategies for speakers of other languages and dialects)	8–10 (approx 10% of the MCIs)	
III. Reading Development (includes knowledge of reading skills and processes in the areas of phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and reading fluency)	35–37 (approx 40% of the MCIs)	
IV. Writing and Research (includes knowledge of writing skills, processes, and conventions; creative expression; use of technology for writing and research)	8–10 (approx 10% of the MCIs)	
V. Specialized Knowledge and Leadership Skills (includes knowledge of language acquisition; learning disabilities and literacy development; child psychology including learning behaviors; cultural contexts of literacy development)	17–19 (approx 20% of the MCIs)	1 (without case study)
VI. Integrated Knowledge and Understanding: Case Study		1 (with case study)

For More Information

If you have questions about the VRA after reading this guide, refer to the registration bulletin, available free of charge, from the VRA Web site at www.vra.nesinc.com. If you have additional questions, please call the offices listed below.

For questions about:

- testing policy
- test requirements
- licensure

Contact:

Virginia Department of Education
Division of Teacher Education and
Licensure
Post Office Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218-2120

Telephone: (800) 292-3820
or
(804) 692-0157

Web site:

[www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/
newvdoe/teached.html](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/newvdoe/teached.html)

For questions about:

- registration and payment
- test dates and registration deadlines
- your admission ticket

Contact:

Virginia Reading Assessment Program
National Evaluation Systems, Inc.
Post Office Box 660
Amherst, MA 01004-9015

Telephone: (866) 613-3292
(Automated Information System Available
24 hours daily)

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf
(TDD): (413) 256-8032

Web site:

www.vra.nesinc.com